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SUBJECT: CODEL HOYER FOCUSES ON FTA AND PLAN COLOMBIA IN  
CARTAGENA AND MEDELLIN (APRIL 6-8)

11. (SBU) Summary. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer led a Congressional Delegation to Cartagena and Medellin, Colombia, from April 6-8, 2009. President Uribe outlined to the delegation the progress Colombia has made, with U.S. support, on counternarcotics efforts and the fact that much remains to be done. He also addressed human rights, emerging criminal groups and violence against labor unions. Uribe asked the CODEL to tell President Obama that he was open to suggestions to find a way forward on the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (CTPA). In a separate meeting, Attorney General Mario Iguaran addressed Members' concerns on human rights as well as cases of labor violence, in addition to describing Colombia's transition to an accusatory system. Members received a briefing from the Colombian Navy on interdiction and international cooperation. They also spoke with labor unionists both in support of and opposed to the FTA. Finally, Members had the opportunity to speak with internally displaced and demobilized persons as well as local political and business leaders. End Summary.

12. (U) Members of the CODEL were: Steny Hoyer (D-MD); Roy Blunt (R-MO); Norman Dicks (D-WA); Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA); Elijah Cummings (D-MD); Gregory Meeks (D-NY); Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL); Adrian Smith (R-NE); Gerry Connolly (D-VA); and Aaron Schock (R-IL).

PRESIDENT URIBE POINTS TO RESULTS, EMPHASIZES PERSEVERANCE  
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13. (SBU) At the official Presidential Residence in Cartagena, President Alvaro Uribe hosted the delegation for a breakfast at which he was joined by his Ministers of Defense, Foreign Relations, and Trade, as well as the directors of the GOC's human rights program and social action agency. Uribe expressed his gratitude for the USG's "essential and enduring support." He underlined that, with U.S. support, the state has recovered its monopoly to fight criminals and administer justice, has built confidence in democratic institutions, and has provided assistance and reparations to the victims of conflict. He noted that the GOC had accomplished all of this without having to resort to a state of emergency or martial law. With regard to the fight against narco-activities, he said, "We haven't won this battle yet, but we're winning." He recognized the constraints of the current economic crisis and the need for adjustments in U.S. support for Colombia, but requested perseverance to consolidate gains and make them sustainable. He acknowledged the importance of human rights, calling them an essential part of democratic security which, if neglected, could undermine the important progress that has

been made. He highlighted social investments in education, health, and housing, especially through the GOC's "Families in Action" program.

¶4. (SBU) Regarding the FARC, Uribe said their numbers had been reduced from 30,000 to 7,000-8,000 through military action, demobilizations, and desertions. He said he supports a peace process with the guerrillas but first needs them to act in good faith. The President cited a series of recent terrorist acts (bombings, murders, and kidnappings) attributed to the FARC. In response to a question from Mr. Hoyer about recidivism among demobilized paramilitaries, Uribe said that of the 35,000 paramilitaries who have been demobilized, about 3,000 had returned to criminal but not paramilitary activity. Of these, approximately 2,000 have been apprehended, making recidivism a real, but limited issue. On extraditions, he said the GOC had addressed concerns raised by the Colombian judiciary and would continue to use this tool as appropriate.

¶5. (SBU) Mr. Hoyer and Mr. Blunt praised the GOC for the counter-narcotics assistance it provides to Mexico and Panama. Uribe said the support would continue but cautioned that losing the battle in Colombia would impact Mexico as well. He remarked that the Merida Initiative is important, but "the battle in Colombia can be won sooner," and without continued support, there could be a backslide.

¶6. (SBU) Responding to a question from Mr. Blunt on changing the mix of funding for Plan Colombia, Defense Minister Santos insisted that continued military assistance is needed to

support development activities, stating, "The hard side is essential to enable the soft side." Santos added that Plan Colombia has helped the GOC to nearly reach a critical point of irreversibility. He asked, "Please prolong this for a couple more years," until all the Plan Colombia efforts are more fully nationalized.

¶7. (SBU) Responding to Mr. Dicks' question about violence against organized labor, Uribe acknowledged that paramilitaries and guerrillas had systematically attacked labor leaders, but he insisted that the GOC is committed to providing effective protection. He highlighted the sharp drop in homicides of labor leaders and increased investigations and prosecutions. Defense Minister Santos added that many union members had been attacked for reasons having nothing to do with labor issues.

¶8. (SBU) Trade Minister Plata brought up the CTPA, saying that delaying the Agreement with Colombia while enacting and continuing with other FTAs in the Hemisphere was tantamount to applying trade sanctions against Colombia. He emphasized that the increased investment that the CTPA would likely generate would support the gains achieved through Plan Colombia. Uribe added that the CTPA has symbolic importance, and while it would bolster foreign direct investment in Colombia, Colombian exports to the U.S. would be unlikely to increase significantly in the near term. Uribe concluded by insisting that the GOC is ready to make adjustments in response to U.S. concerns. He said, "We are receptive to your suggestions. Tell President Obama we need his support."

¶9. (U) In a brief press conference following the breakfast, Mr. Hoyer and Mr. Blunt confirmed their support for the FTA and said they would work with the Obama Administration to advance the issue. Mr. Hoyer expressed his appreciation of the GOC's progress on human rights issues and said that Plan Colombia "has worked, is working, and needs to continue."

ATTORNEY GENERAL IGUARAN EMPHASIZES COMMITMENT TO  
INVESTIGATING LABOR VIOLENCE CASES

¶10. (SBU) In Medellin, Attorney General Mario Iguaran thanked the delegation for its interest in seeing progress on human rights and labor-related cases and reiterated his commitment

to the same. Iguaran described the steps that the Fiscalía has taken to end impunity for crimes against labor and human rights leaders, including implementation of an accusatory justice system; creation of a special sub-unit to investigate human rights and labor-related violence; and prioritization of 187 cases against labor union leaders and affiliates. He also said that the results -- 133 sentences convicting 269 people -- prove their efforts. Mr. Smith asked for an update on the status of arrests and convictions in the "parapolitical" scandal. Iguaran said they had obtained over 600 related court decisions, including cases against six Colombia Members of Congress. Representative Connolly said the apparent link between attacks against unionist organizers of a March 6, 2008 anti-GOC demonstration and a series of public accusations against the organizers by presidential advisor Jose Obdulio Gaviria lends itself to accusations of direct government involvement in violence against unionists. Iguaran responded that while the Fiscalía has not ruled out a connection, its investigations to date have not uncovered any evidence to that effect. Iguaran added that no cases, past or present, suggest that violence against unionists is state policy. Representative Wasserman Schultz asked why judges who adjudicate labor-related cases are not given longer or even permanent terms, which would increase their effectiveness. She also cited accusations by NGOs that the government removed the judges precisely for being too effective. Iguaran said the Fiscalía supports longer terms, but that the authority rests with the Superior Council of the Judiciary, and is therefore outside of his competency. He also pointed out that often the replacement judges' effectiveness has been equal to or better than their predecessors.

#### NAVY COMMANDANT HIGHLIGHTS RESULTS OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

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11. (U) At the Cartagena Naval Club, Navy Commandant Admiral Guillermo Barrera expressed his gratitude for the "essential partnership of the U.S." and briefed the delegation on the record number of cocaine seizures achieved by international cooperation, improved intelligence sharing, and the deployment of aerial surveillance and high-speed interdiction boats. He claimed that, on aggregate, \$31 in cocaine had been seized for every dollar invested in resources since the U.S. ) Colombia Maritime Interdiction Agreement was signed in 1997. Barrera highlighted the central role that human rights plays in the Colombian Navy and noted that as security gains have been achieved, public trust in the armed forces has risen dramatically. He added that the following week the Colombian Navy would be welcoming the first international class in its School for Maritime Interdiction, which will include 25 international students from 11 countries in the region. The Majority leader noted that a child saved by Colombian Naval interdiction could just as easily be from one of the Members' district as from Colombia.

#### UNIONIST OPPONENTS OF CTPA OFFER ARGUMENTS FOR PROTECTIONISM

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12. (SBU) The delegation discussed the CTPA with leaders from Colombia's largest labor confederations and unions. The unionists, largely representing the public sector, outlined their opposition to the CTPA, arguing it would: stifle Colombian industry; leave Colombian farmers unable to compete with heavily-subsidized American farmers, compromising Colombian food security; promote the entry into Colombia of multi-national companies, which would exploit Colombia's people and resources; and cause Colombia to lose \$500 million in import duties it currently enjoys. The unionists said they support the position held by U.S. labor that Colombia needs to improve its human rights situation before entering into a trade treaty. They said unionists in Colombia are excluded from the political process and threatened, attacked, and murdered for their legal union activities, and that the perpetrators of these crimes enjoy impunity under the current administration. Mr. Hoyer emphasized that the Members of the

CODEL believed workers should be protected in exercising their rights and that they want the CTPA to have a positive effect on workers. Representative Connolly questioned how both U.S. industry and Colombian industry could both experience a net-loss in economic terms under the CTPA. Representative Roybal-Allard said it is important to put a human face on the statistics, and that both governments would need to find a way to compensate and/or retrain the economic losers under the CTPA.

#### PRO-CTPA UNIONISTS EMPHASIZE THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT COME WITH CTPA

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¶13. (SBU) The delegation discussed the CTPA with a second group of unionists, largely representing sectors that would benefit from the Agreement, including textiles and packaging.

Gerardo Sanchez, President of the Union of Textile Workers, argued that the CTPA would not directly affect the majority of union members in Colombia, who tend to come from the public sector (including teachers). He argued that the minority that constitutes union federation leadership generally oppose the Agreement on ideological grounds. Luis Fernando Cadavid, President of the Union of Clothing and Textile Workers of Antioquia pointed out that only about 800,000 out of 18 million workers are unionized, and that the vast majority of the workforce would benefit from increased trade under the CTPA. The group also said they felt the current administration is taking appropriate steps to control violence against unionists: dismantling paramilitary groups, improving public safety, and offering protection to vulnerable and/or threatened groups. They also said that most of the violence against unionists was not due to their union affiliation, but rather a result of common crime or personal disputes. Each member said that despite their average of more than 20 years as union leaders, they have not felt threatened because of their union activities.

#### USAID-SUPPORTED JOB TRAINING CENTER BENEFITS DISPLACED AND DEMOBILIZED

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¶14. (U) The delegation visited the job training center of the Fundacion Indufrial. Indufrial is a large Colombian manufacturer of commercial refrigerators with a long history of corporate social responsibility. With the support of USAID since 2003, the Foundation has supported the socio-economic reintegration of thousands of internally displaced persons and demobilized guerillas and paramilitaries through vocational training and counseling. The delegation toured the Indufrial plant and met in small groups with beneficiaries to discuss the demobilization process and the danger of recidivism as well as the displacement and resettlement of vulnerable communities.

¶15. (U) Cartagena Mayor Judith Pinedo also met with the delegation at Indufrial and briefed them on the city's focus on social justice and poverty reduction, especially with respect to Cartagena's large Afro-Colombian population.

#### DEFENSE VICE MINISTER JARAMILLO SHOWCASES GOC INTERAGENCY CONSOLIDATION STRATEGY

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¶16. (U) At the Montes de Maria Fusion Center in Cartagena, Vice Minister of Defense Sergio Jaramillo briefed the delegation on the Center for Coordinated and Integrated Action (CCAI), part of the GOC's National Consolidation Strategy. The GOC recently created the Montes de Maria center following the success of the La Macarena fusion center which has been operating for the past year in the historical heartland of the FARC. The CCAI model is an integrated approach designed to consolidate security gains in vulnerable areas and establish a permanent presence of government agencies and services to support local communities. The program includes effective police presence, rule of law, coca eradication, and socio-economic development. Jaramillo explained that the goal is to create permanent, irreversible

results using a Clear - Hold - Build approach. Each fusion center is led by three co-coordinators from the military, police, and civilian government.

¶17. (U) The CODEL cleared this cable.  
BROWNFIELD